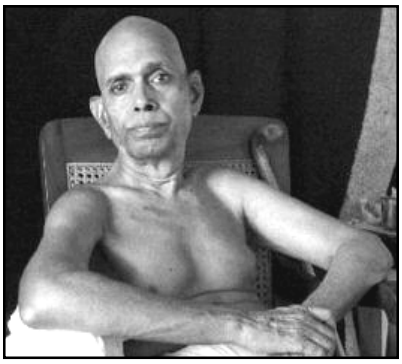



# The Maharshi

MAR/APR 2001 VOL.11, NO. 2


# IN DAYS OF GREAT PEACE

by Mouni Sadhu

In Days of Great Peace, *a book recounting Mouni Sadhu's (M. Sudouski) visit to the Ashram of Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1949, was first published in 1953. It has been out of print for many years and is now in the process of being republished by Sri Ramanasramam. We hope to have it available in our book store in a few months.*

In Days of Great Peace *inspired many Westerners to seek spiritual guidance from Sri Ramana Maharshi in the years following his Mahasamadhi.*

*Through a narrative that is both simple and profound, the author takes us on his journey to the quiet hermitage of the renowned Sage of Arunachala in South India. Basking in the radiance of the 'Great Rishi' his mind turns inward, following the path of Self-inquiry of 'Who Am I?'. He describes, with perceptive insight and emotion, how in the gracious presence of the Master, thoughts are stilled and one rests calmly in the thought-free, egoless state.*

*Below are a few excerpts from various chapters of the book.*

### The First Meeting

When I arrived at the abode of Maharshi, called 'Ramanashram,' and jumped out from the two-wheeled cart just in front of the temple, in spite of the late hour, but in accordance with the custom of the place, I was taken straight into the presence of the Sage.

He was sitting in a large hall near one of its walls, apparently at the end of his meal. There were a number of people — all Indians sitting in rows on the floor between the pillars. I was led to within three or four yards of Maharshi, and my companion said a few words to him of which the name of the country from which I came was the only one I understood. The Saint lifted up his head, looked at me, and made a gesture with his hand as if inviting me to come a little nearer. I was struck by the softness and serenity of this movement, so simple and dignified that I immediately felt I was facing a great man. His attitude was so natural that the newcomer did not feel any wonder or shyness. All critical faculty of thought and curiosity dropped away. So I was unable to make observations or comparisons, although subconsciously I may have had this intention when previously imagining this first meeting. The image of the Sage was, in this very first moment, vividly engraved on my mind without any qualifications, like a picture cast on a sensitive photo-plate. But as nothing can be conveyed without words, I will try to describe his appearance.

Maharshi, as I saw him, was a thin, white-haired, very gracious old man; his skin had the color of old ivory; his movements were easy, calm and soft; his countenance breathed a natural state of inner concentration without the slightest effort of will. Or may I say that he had reached that stage when willpower no longer needs to be used for overcoming any hindrance or for achieving any purpose, for the simple reason that everything has already been achieved.

A modest Indian supper was served — a little rice,

vegetables and fruit on a banana leaf. By the time I had finished, Maharshi had gone. As soon as I found myself in the small one-room cottage prepared for me in the Ashram's compound, I immediately fell asleep, being very tired after my whole day's journey.

### Life in Maharshi's Ashram

The next day was occupied in getting acquainted with the routine of the Ashram: the hours of meditation in the presence of the Sage, the time of meals in the dining-hall, and so on.

The simple way of life in the Ashram helps one to concentrate and dive deep into oneself. The very atmosphere, charged with the thoughts of so many people seeking their real Self, according to the teachings of the Master, turns the mind inwards and is favorable to introspection. The invisible yet powerful influence of the sacred hill of Arunachala also has its part in creating this peculiar atmosphere, but of that I will speak later.

At 7 A.M. there was the loud sound of a gong calling us to breakfast. When I reached the dining hall, Maharshi was just mounting the few steps leading to it. He was accompanied by several Indians, his permanent attendants. Here, in full daylight, I noticed for the first time that the physical state of Maharshi was really precarious. He walked with difficulty, as his joints and knees were affected by acute rheumatism. His left arm and elbow were bandaged because of a malignant tumour, which had begun its growth about six months earlier and, in spite of two operations, had continued to spread its devastating work, causing Maharshi's death one year later. Sometimes his head shook slightly and this increased the impression of serious ill health; the whole frame, once tall and powerful, was now bent and weak.

After reaching the hall, Maharshi took his place near the wall, opposite the entrance. He sat alone while, facing him, plantain leaves were spread on the floor for the rest of the residents. I occupied a place on his right, about three yards away, and that spot remained mine during the whole period of my stay.

The Sage ate with his hand according to the general Indian custom. His movements seemed to be automatic. I saw that he was quite aware of his surroundings and reacted in a normal way to all the phenomena of the outward world, but I felt certain that his real Self had nothing to do with the functions and actions of his visible vehicle.

There are three communal meals in the Ashram: lunch or dinner at about 11:30 A.M., supper at 7.30 P.M. and also tea at 3.30 P.M. for the Ashram guests and occasional visitors. One is given tea, coffee, or by special request, milk, as was the case with me. The dishes are well prepared, but some vegetables and pastry have many condiments added and are too hot for the European palate. [Less spicy preparations are now available for Westerners]

Maharshi took a little of everything. At the end of the meal, when buttermilk was distributed, he made a kind of round wall of rice, leaving a space in the middle for the liquid. When he had enough he stopped, with a gesture to the Brahmin who was serving. He never left a single grain of rice on his leaf.

During the first weeks of my stay in the Ashram, Maharshi spent the whole day, with the exception of the hours of sleep and food, under a small bamboo roof near the library building, facing the dining hall. He reclined on a big stone couch covered with mats, cotton rugs and a few pillows.

His disciples and visitors sat on the concrete floor facing Maharshi. For the morning and evening meditations certain sadhus, pupils of the Master, often came from the caves of Arunachala. Every day the Vedas were recited and before the night meal holy hymns were chanted, often those composed by Maharshi himself in his younger days. Every fortnight one of the permanent residents, a learned Brahmin, sang a most beautiful hymn; it was, as I learned, in praise of the 'Lord of the Universe'. It was full of melodic implications and the endings of the words, which of course I did not understand, will forever remain in my memory, like so many other things in this abode of peace.

It took some time before I could adjust myself to the rhythm of the Ashram life and could inwardly

approach Maharshi. At first I had to struggle with mental distrust, with the tendency to look for blemishes in the lives of those who surrounded the Sage. I was simply wasting precious time in a vain fight with my mental windmills. I was looking on Maharshi from the narrow citadel of the ego, of my own small personality. I was aware that I should not do so, that I should step out of my self into a broader path, and that only thus could I find enlightenment.

Yet as days passed, the radiance emanating from the Sage was slowly doing its invisible work. At first I wanted to have a talk with him, but I was disheartened by the shallowness of what I tried to say. Then at last, intuition showed the proper way:

*Silence is the most powerful form of teaching transmitted from Master to pupil. There is no word by which one can convey the important things, the deepest truths.* — From Maharshi's Sayings

I began to listen intently to the silence surrounding the Master. I understood what a high degree of concentration, of the control of the movement of thoughts, is necessary to be able to open the door of the mind to the subtle vibrations constantly radiated by Maharshi, which led one to high initiation. I also came to understand that my previous exercises were not of the best, that here they would prove insufficient. At first it was rather depressing to see that my former methods had to be re-examined and changed.

I realized that the amount of knowledge I could find and assimilate here depended upon my own attitude and that I myself was responsible for catching and using to the full this unique opportunity of being at Maharshi's feet, an opportunity which would never again be repeated. In other words, the amount of light penetrating my being would depend directly upon the opening of the doors of my consciousness.

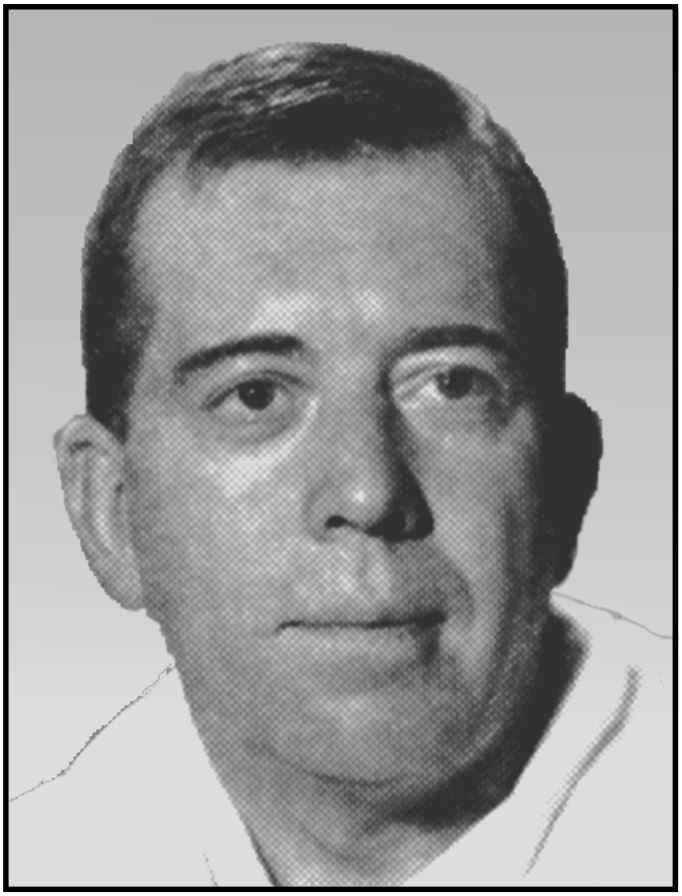
There were many other doubts and hesitations, but I do not think it useful to repeat here all such misconceived ideas. The answers to my doubts came quite unexpectedly and simply, as did everything in this strange abode.

I had read much about Maharshi before coming to the Ashram. I knew that he sees the content of the inner being of every man who approaches him, although he never shows that he does so or speaks about it. So this case was not surprising to me. But I had also personally to experience this extraordinary power of the Master. It was essential, for without a complete trust in the Master, without a belief that his consciousness is one with the Absolute, as well as one with that of his pupil, the realization of Self-knowledge is impossible.

As week after week is spent near him, the shell of the separated personality bursts and dissolves. I always feel this process when I am with him....

### The Darshan Resumed

It is the morning meditation. The temple hall is full. I see many new faces, not only Indian but from other lands as well.... One thing is clear: we take farewell of the Maharshi, each one according to his own capacity. The form of it does not matter. We are



**Mouni Sadhu (M. Sudouski)**

all united at the feet of the Master in adoration and in Silence.

Yogi Ramiah, immovable in contemplation with a face as if cut from granite, is sitting at his Master's feet surrounded by Brahmins of the Ashram staff. An elderly lady just opposite me is gazing intently at Maharshi with an expression of boundless devotion, but also of despair and a kind of inner revolt, as if she is unable to accept the certainty that soon she will no longer see him in his earthly form.

And Maharshi? After this new operation, he is thinner than ever; the features seem to be transparent, the color of his face more fair, as if there were nothing earthly about him. A statue, an abstraction incarnate, if this expression can convey any meaning. No, it is the spirit, which, from the sphere of matter, returns to its own realm, and is only in a very loose and subtle way in touch with what we see as the physical body of the Saint.

His peace is permeating everything all round us. There are no more unsolved problems, no unfulfilled desires, no movements in my consciousness. It is now clear that there is no need of thinking as it seemed before — for thinking is an unnecessary, purposeless thing.

What is it that concerns me now? What is happening to me?

Where is that man who had a name, and many thoughts? All this now seems so far from 'Me'. Oh, if I could only hold this state at any cost, and not return to the world of shadows and illusions! If I could only remain in this silence wherein there is no 'I' and 'you', no time, no space!

The light is now pouring out in such abundance that everything is inundated by it. The open eyes see nothing but light.

I know that this form, now so foreign to me, seems not to breathe any more. Would its breath disturb the peace of eternity? I do not know.

In this light, boundaries of the 'past' and the 'future' are vanishing. Both are now like open plains. No, it is not true, for the momentary awe before the opening of the great gate now gives way to the happiness of awareness that time does not exist any more. Like a lightning flash come to my memory, the words of the Revelation of St. John: " . . . that there should be time no longer".

Yes, I now realize that true life is independent of time, and that if we are still living in time it is not real life. Resurrection, that unfathomable mystery, becomes a realized truth here in this invisible life.

## Farewell

I am returning from the temple hall where people were passing before Maharshi's couch as in a procession. I have not taken part in it. I am waiting for 6 P.M. when the flow of visitors stops. From six till seven-thirty the Master is often alone. Hence, it is the best time to approach and take leave of him.

The night is exceptionally hot with no breeze, not even a breath of the usual cooler eastern wind. The road is empty and there is no one at the Ashram gate, only several motor cars stand in its large courtyard.

Twilight reigns in the temple hall. I stop for a moment at the door. Maharshi is sitting in his habitual posture, reclining on pillows and looking into space. One of the young attendants is sitting in a corner, almost invisible in its darkness. No one else is in the hall.

Maharshi now sees me and a slight smile appears. I approach him, but all the well-prepared words of farewell and the last requests disappear from my mind. It remains empty, there is not even a single thought.

I salute and stop quite near to him. He looks into my eyes. I plunge into the light of his. No words are now needed. I know that the Saint reads my heart. He has seen each word in my mind even before I put them together.

Deep down some sadness flutters in me. I see for the last time the one who is my Master and my Friend, whose like I shall never find again were I to search all the worlds. Yet a subtle but irresistible wave of strength flows from Him. It carries away this cloud and penetrates the whole of my being. Now my consciousness is pure and transparent; I feel it is thus that I wanted to stand before Him.

I see a kind of encouragement to express myself in words emanating from His beautiful face. Well,

I say to myself, I shall try if it is necessary.

And I begin to tell Him slowly and clearly that I have to leave the Ashram and beg His permission, and after He nods in consent, I proceed to ask His blessing for my present, my future, and forever. His eyes seem even more luminous; the face, expressing a superhuman kindness, seems to become more serious. He gives me the blessing. I know He sees my next, still-unexpressed entreaty. I do not hear any words, yet I feel He is asking me whether I am aware of the meaning of my own prayer. And without moving my lips, I give Him my answer. Yet all is so natural, so simple, so real, that I would rather doubt my standing here than this mute conversation. A short silence follows.

Oh, I could stand like this, near him without end, for all eternity, with no other wish in my heart. Minutes seem to pass, though they may be only seconds.

The last request which I wanted to express is, according to the Master's teaching, a kind of concession to the visible, hence the unreal, world. It is for the pupil to have a visible, tangible sign of the Guru's grace, sanctified by ages of tradition. I had been told that Maharshi never gives it, and even in his biographies I had read the answers given by him to such requests. It meant that he was careful and strict even with appearances.

But here, now, when I am standing before him with an open heart, feeling all that is taking place with joy and certainty, how could I be refused ?

As soon as I begin my sentence somewhat shyly, his wonderful smile comes to encourage me.

I bow my head and feel the touch of his hand on my brow, the delicate touch of his fingers along my head. A subtle current of power and purity passes through my whole frame.

In a lightning flash, I realize that the power of this moment will sustain me in all the years to come, and its light will for ever shine on my life.

We do not talk any more. I salute for the last time, he nods in the Hindu way which denotes consent or approbation and I withdraw slowly towards the door, looking at His face with all intensity to engrave it forever in the depths of my heart. I walk in a joyous peace back to my cell, through the dark paths of the garden. A few Ashram friends accompany me to my gate in perfect silence, for Indians know how to behave in solemn moments.

The inner voice says: "Separation from the Master is no more possible." And so it has proved.

## Protecting Arunachala

### *The Legal Efforts*

***An Update, March 4, 2001:*** The High Court in Madras has put forth a draft scheme for the maintenance, development and conservation of the Giripradakshina Path in Tiruvanamalai. This was done during the week ending March 2. Fuller details of the scheme are awaited.

The draft scheme contemplates some restriction on construction and activities between the Path and the Hill, though not a complete ban. A provision is made for the creation of a regulatory body with representation from government departments and the ashramas. The Court will shortly hear reactions of the parties to the draft scheme and then pass final orders.

## *The Children's Ashrama in Nova Scotia*

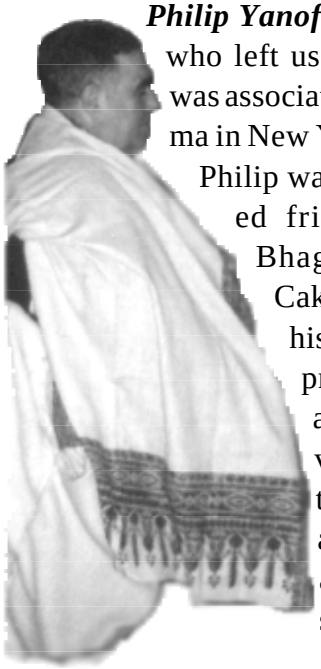
*This year the Children's Ashrama at the Bridgetown, Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama is scheduled to commence on Sunday, August 19th and continue for five days. Those parents who wish to have their children participate, or desire more information, please call:*

*Darlene in Nova Scotia*
*902-665-2263*
*or*
*The New York Ashrama*
*718-575-3215*

# Remembering

"FOR what is inevitable, one should not grieve," say the scriptures. Yet we all experience some difficulty coping with the loss of someone who had filled a large portion of our lives. The ultimate lesson is clear in the light of the Maharshi's teachings. It was the intimation of death and an intense desire to understand its implications that transformed the limited awareness of the boy Venkataraman into the Pure Awareness of the Sage of Arunachala. Following his lead, we, in whatever measured way possible, can certainly gain maturity of thought and deep insight by contemplating what death is. We must admit that 'death,' even with all its connotations of 'finality,' has the single-most power to take our attention away from the irrelevance of the world and into the awareness of Eternity, our True Home. Then we understand that life is not a pleasure garden but a training ground to prepare us for the final absorption into the Heart, our Source, the abode Peace and Joy.

Since the passing of Arunachala Ashrama's founder, Sri Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawat, last April, we have experienced an unusual number of deaths among close friends, parents of friends, and devotees.



***Philip Yanofsky*** was one among those who left us during this past year. He was associated with Arunachala Ashrama in New York since the early 1970s. Philip was a warm, generous-hearted friend who highly valued Bhagawat's 'CCC' (Coffee, Cake and Conversation). With his imposing rotund physical presence, innate humor and an innocent, yet highly convoluted and perplexing intellect, he never failed to amuse us, enrich our lives and deepen our understanding and appreciation of friendship. He had a relentless zeal for meditation and believed that all life's ills could be overcome by 'making the effort' through meditation.

In 1990, after retirement, he moved with his wife to Florida. Last October, about two weeks before his passing, a few of us had the opportunity to visit him there. Amidst his physical suffering, he was cheerful, overwhelmed with gratitude and a deep devotion to God.

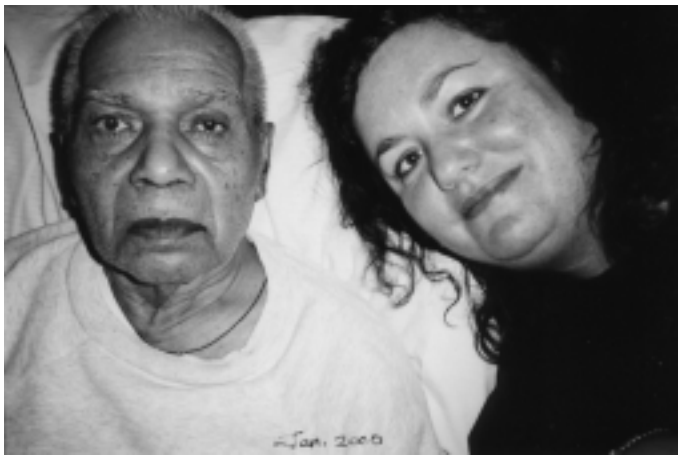
Another friend who recently was absorbed in Eternal Peace, and who had been associated continually with Arunachala Ashrama since the early 1980s, was ***Olivia Satenberg***. A couple of years ago she moved to Chicago with her husband Dick. Nevertheless, she and Dick remained an intrinsic part of the Ashrama.

Olivia was blessed with an unusually warm, generous and open heart that immediately embraced any acquaintance as her own personal family member. Most all of the New York Ashrama family had an opportunity to spend time with her during her illness. She passed on peacefully at home with her husband by her side. Below is an account of the funeral which many of the Ashrama friends attended:

Olivia very peacefully breathed her last on January 26, 2001. Her funeral was on Monday, January 29th at the Bohemian Crematory in Chicago. A good number of friends from Arunachala Ashrama, both in person and in spirit, joined Dick in paying their respects to dear Olivia.

Olivia had earlier on expressed her wishes about the funeral. As the funeral commenced, it was clear that it had taken on a life of its own. It felt like yet another "Sunday afternoon at the Ashrama," just as Olivia wished.

The ceremony began by reading a message from Dennis Hartel who was then at Sri Ramanasramam, India. Dick then placed *kumkum* on Olivia's forehead and garlanded her. Following the instruction from Sri Sundaram, President of Sri Ramanasramam, the garland that was on Bhagavan's picture was then placed on Olivia's body, which was beautifully draped in the lilac-colored saree of her choice. The chapel resonated with the sounds of the same



**Olivia with Bhagawat in January 2000**

holy recitations that are usually sung in the evenings at the Arunachala Ashrama, the hymns and chants which Olivia adored.

Passages from the Tulsidas *Ramayana* were read out. Olivia held the stories from the Tulsidas *Ramayana*, especially the stories about Hanuman, very close to her heart. Even when her body was very frail she would ask friends to read to her passages from the *Ramayana*. Till the last she spoke about the story of Hanuman baring his chest to reveal the images of his beloved Rama and Sita therein.

Also, the chapter on "Surrender" from *Gems from Sri Bhagavan* was read. Evelyn Saphier then presented a beautiful memento — a picture of Olivia and Dick printed along with a passage about Olivia composed by Paul, her husband, who was unable to attend the funeral. Evelyn led the gathering in a simple heartfelt song composed by Margo Martin in memory of Olivia:

*Oh Bhagavan, My Bhagavan*
*Hold Me Close*
*Shelter Me*
*Om Bhagavan Sri Bhagavan*
*Sharanam, Sharanam*

Everyone present — friends, family and colleagues — were united in the openhearted and friendly spirit of Olivia, as they shared stories, memories, and tributes. Dick spoke about how his heart was completely shattered with the loss of Olivia, and yet he sincerely felt that the purpose of the years spent with her was to start him on his journey to Arunachala.

We all bid our final good-bye to Olivia with flowers and chants of "Arunachala Shiva". Pictures of Sri Bhagavan and Hanuman were placed on Olivia's body before the cremation. After the poignant ceremony, the group gathered in Dick's home to share warmth and friendship in Olivia's memory.

Those of us who have been involved in Olivia's life, have been truly inspired to turn inwards, towards Sri Bhagavan even more strongly.

*The 51st Aradhana*
*of*
*Sri Ramana Maharshi*
*will be observed in the New York Arunachala Ashrama*
*on*
***Saturday, April 21, 2001***
*The program will begin at 11:00 A.M.*

---

*for more information, please call*
*(718) 575-3215*

The *MAHARSHI* is a free bimonthly newsletter edited by Dennis Hartel and Dr. Anil Sharma and distributed in North America by Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. For those with Internet access, this issue and all back issues are available at "http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/newslet2.htm".

Books, videos, audio CDs and tapes on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found on the Internet at "http//www.arunachala.org".